

## **The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Regional Development, Infrastructure and Transport**

### **Inquiry into the implications of severe weather events on the national regional, rural, and remote road network**

#### **Submission by Rural Councils Victoria**

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##### **Who we are and who we represent**

Rural Councils Victoria (RCV) is an incorporated body representing 34 smaller rural councils across country Victoria.

Our membership does not include regional cities, so our focus is on issues relevant to smaller rural areas some of which are isolated or sparsely populated.

Our members' experiences will also reflect those of many smaller rural and remote areas across Australia.

One in nine Victorians live in rural communities and are served by rural Councils.

In Victoria, 38 of the 79 councils are classified as 'rural', including a number on the urban fringe.

Victoria's rural councils are responsible for 79 per cent of Victoria's land area and have a combined population of approximately 836,000 (ABS 2020), 12.5 per cent of Victoria's population.

##### **Context**

Communities, families, individuals, and businesses across rural Victoria have been adversely affected by the floods of 2022/23. In many rural areas, roads have been washed out and/or been so badly damaged that they are unusable.

Prior to the floods, many rural roads were already in a shocking state of disrepair.

A survey of rural mayors conducted by RCV in 2022 **before** the floods, found that the state of the local roads network was the number one priority for mayors and their local communities. Of course, **after** the floods, this is even more pertinent.

##### **Road engineering and construction standards required to enhance the resiliency of future road construction**

RCV supports an ongoing review of road engineering and construction standards to enhance the resilience of future road construction.

The review should include:

- An expert committee with the powers and capability for the standards to be reviewed regularly to take into consideration improvements in construction methods, materials and approaches and other relevant developments.
- A review of successful construction methods used internationally in regions that are subjected to natural disasters (particularly floods and wildfires).

Establish greater Federal Government funding for local roads to ensure that resources are adequate to ensure:

- roads and road assets are built back to an appropriate higher standard, and
- that any future road upgrades and/or repairs are also to that higher standard.

### **Identification of climate resilient corridors suitable for future road construction projects**

It is vital that local knowledge is considered when seeking to identify future climate resilient corridors.

- RCV recommends that Federal and State governments seek the input of, and work closely with, individual and appropriate groups of rural councils on future road projects

### **Opportunities to enhance road resilience through the use of waterproof products in road construction**

The Australian Road Research Board (ARRB) said recently it had completed research of new and next generation materials to improve water resistance and enable a quicker recovery after significant rainfall events.

Rural Councils Victoria recommends that:

- Consideration be given to the ARRB's suggestion that the Federal Government helps ARRB partner with Local Governments across Australia to implement a major change in road construction materials and technologies.
- Consider the use of recycled materials in road construction

### **The Commonwealth's role in road resilience planning**

- *Improve betterment funding model:*

Current funding arrangements do not encourage improvements in the resilience of infrastructure that are damaged during natural disasters.

Currently, funds are provided to local governments to reinstate infrastructure to the pre-disaster condition. Resilience improvements are often not funded or only partially funded under the recovery funding program.

Improvements that would prevent or reduce damage from future natural disasters would save money in the long term.

It is recommended that recovery programs promote and incentivise the upgrade and improvement of disaster-affected infrastructure as part of the funding models.

- *Proactive mitigation asset assessment fund*

Rural Councils Victoria is calling on the federal government to create a dedicated fund for resilient (pre-disaster mitigation) asset assessments.

Funding is needed for proactive assessments of assets in areas identified as prone to climate-related disasters to increase the resilience of infrastructure.

Funding would ensure rural councils have the resources available to engage suitably qualified professionals to assess and provide recommendations relating to disaster-prone infrastructure.

Local Governments could then program works through their normal capital expenditure processes or prepare site-specific funding applications to funding agencies.

### **Related issues**

RCV recommends that

- The Federal Government fund detailed, localised flood mapping for each council area to ensure future road projects are appropriately sited and climate resilient
- Funding is provided – where assessed necessary – for the construction of new culverts and expansion of existing culverts to ensure they are of the scale adequate to drain projected flood waters, helping prevent water-penetration of road surfaces and sub-surfaces, thereby minimising any road damage
- Fund regular (annual) clearing of weeds and other obstructions in flood channels, to ensure that flood waters are directed appropriately rather than being allowed to pool and damage roads